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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES

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October 3, 2007

TO: Each Supervisor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Browning', is placed over the 'TO:' line.

FROM: Philip L. Browning, Director
Department of Public Social Services

**SUBJECT: ENHANCED AND EXPANDED ACTION PLAN TO REDUCE CalWORKs
WELFARE-TO-WORK SANCTIONS**

On December 6, 2006, the Department provided your Board with the second report on CalWORKs sanctions, *"Sanctioned Participants and the Challenge of Meeting Welfare-to-Work Requirements in the Era of TANF Reauthorization,"* prepared by the Service Integration Branch of the Chief Executive Office. While the initial report in 2004 focused on short-term sanctions, the second report focused on chronically sanctioned participants (i.e., those with multiple or long-term sanctions).

The findings in the second report provide valuable insights into why some participants experience multiple sanctions, and why participants can remain sanctioned for extended periods of time.

Background

The report examines in detail the characteristics of chronically sanctioned participants and the reasons why these participants do not comply with welfare-to-work requirements. The key findings relative to chronically sanctioned participants include the following:

- 1) Some accept a sanction due to overwhelming caretaking responsibilities;
- 2) A higher proportion are unemployed or, if employed, work in relatively unstable, low-skill, low paying jobs;
- 3) Some use Specialized Supportive Services much less than actually needed;

Background (cont'd)

- 4) Homelessness and housing instability were observed in higher proportions;
- 5) Some are more likely to have unmet child care and transportation needs;
- 6) Many have more educational deficits than those never sanctioned; and
- 7) Focus group findings suggest some sanctions are related to communication problems and a fundamental lack of understanding among some participants.

Planning Process

Soon after the second report was released, my staff formed the GAIN Sanction Study II Workgroup, involving managers from DPSS, as well as key partners from other County departments, service providers and advocates. From February 2007 through July 2007, strategies were developed to address the findings and were grouped into short-term (to be achieved by December 2007), mid-term (to be achieved by June 2008) and long-term (to be achieved by December 2008) categories.

Action Plan II

Mirroring the process used for the initial sanction study, the external workgroup developed an Action Plan II based on the nine key research findings. Action Plan II contains 57 separate action items, the rationale for the actions and the projected time frame for implementation and completion of each action.

A key feature of the Action Plan II is the expansion of the very successful GAIN Sanction Home Visit Outreach (GSHVO) Project to focus on specific interventions for the chronically sanctioned. For example, GSHVO staff will serve the chronically sanctioned by retaining, for an extended period of time, responsibility for the resolution of the sanction and ensuring that participation is resumed before the case is returned to the case-carrying worker. Other planned action items include improving training and employment opportunities, designing specialized classes, and targeted teaching techniques to enhance chances of successful completion, providing additional training to all GAIN staff, and improving communication between staff and participants.

Of the 54 action items, 19 have already been completed and 35 are in progress.

Each Supervisor
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Reports to the Board

As we currently submit semi-annual reports to your Board on the Department's progress in reducing sanctions, we will incorporate into those reports all the actions taken out of both Action Plans. We will submit our next report to you by the end of 2007.

PLB:fa

Attachment

c: Chief Executive Officer
 Deputy Chief Executive Officer
 County Counsel
 Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors

**Sanctioned Participants and the Challenge of Meeting Welfare-to-Work
Requirements in the Era of TANF Reauthorization**

Action Plan

| | |
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| I. <u>RESEARCH FINDING:</u> Focus group participants took a sanction because of what they felt to be overwhelming caretaking responsibilities for the members of their families. | |
| ACTIONS | |
| A. Explore a State Law change to provide a financial incentive to participants who cure their sanction. | |
| <i>Earning back lost grant can be an incentive to participate.</i> | <i>Long -Term Goal</i> |
| B. Identify Life Skills classes, add them to the GEARS inventory, and allow them to count towards the 32-hour work requirement. | |
| <i>Life skills instructional materials can provide coping strategies for caretakers.</i> | <i>Mid-Term Goal</i> |
| C. Explore expanding Community Service for participants with special needs, including participants being able to volunteer at their child's school. Ensure participants are aware they can create their own Community Service activity to better meet their personal needs. Outreach to the schools to inform them of the expansion of the availability of volunteer opportunities and train GSW staff. | |
| <i>Specialized Community Service activities can assist when the activity involves proximity to the family member for whom caretaking need exists.</i> | <i>Short-Term Goal</i> |
| D. Educate GSWs on services in the community and have each Region maintain a list pertinent to their Region. | |
| <i>Expanding knowledge base of case management staff will enable them to provide more effective services in general, and specifically in connection with those confronted by overwhelming caretaking responsibilities.</i> | <i>Short-Term Goal</i> |
| E. Inform participants about the IHSS Program, so they can explore being paid for caretaking of ill household member. Outreach to CalWORKs families with SSI member(s) regarding this option. | |
| <i>This would provide employment in the participant's home.</i> | <i>Short-Term Goal</i> |

Goals are defined as follows: Short-Term 1-6 months (End of December 2007)
 Mid-Term 7-12 months (End of June 2008)
 Long-Term 13 -18 months (End of December 2008)

**Sanctioned Participants and the Challenge of Meeting Welfare-to-Work
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Action Plan

- II. RESEARCH FINDING:** A higher proportion of chronically sanctioned participants are unemployed. Also, they tend to work in relatively unstable, low-skill, low paying jobs.

ACTIONS

- A. Expand the DPSS Clerical Registry to give hiring consideration to CalWORKs participants for open non-promotional DPSS job opportunities.**

Giving hiring consideration to CalWORKs participants will expand employment opportunities for CalWORKS participants.

Short-Term Goal

- B. Work with Community Colleges to expand the work study program in FY 2007/08, and simplify the process.**

Work study positions provide skills and prepare individuals for future unsubsidized employment.

Short-Term Goal

- C. Explore expanding subsidized employment opportunities for participants.**

Expanding subsidized employment opportunities with a focus on participants with barriers will create pathways toward self-sufficiency.

Mid-Term Goal

- D. Outreach to sanctioned persons who are employed.**

Outreach will identify any barriers and build on employment/achievement.

Completed

- E. Increase referrals to non-traditional employment for women by outreaching to educational institutions/training providers providing non-traditional training for women, and sharing available programs with GSWs, assessors, and GAIN Regional Education and Training Committees.**

Broadening employment preparation strategies will assist in reducing levels of unemployment among the chronically sanctioned.

Long-Term Goal

**Sanctioned Participants and the Challenge of Meeting Welfare-to-Work
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Action Plan

- III. RESEARCH FINDING:** Chronically sanctioned participants use specialized supportive services designed to help participants with issues related to substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence much less frequently than either never sanctioned or short-term sanction participants. Also, the odds of becoming chronically sanctioned are cut in half if a participant receives specialized supportive services.

ACTIONS

- A. Explore taking additional measures to expand and intensify efforts to identify chronically sanctioned participants with Specialized Supportive Services (SSS) needs, and engage them in appropriate services. This includes assessing the feasibility of including an SSS provider in the GAIN Sanction Home Visits.**

Determining previously unidentified Specialized Supportive Services needs will facilitate linking of chronically sanctioned participants with the interventions needed.

Mid-Term Goal

- B. Ensure staff adheres to the VAWA, U Visas, and SB 1569 (trafficking victims) requirements as they pertain to participants with a need for Domestic Violence services.**

Providing case managers with training will place them in a better position to assist participants.

Short-Term Goal

- IV. RESEARCH FINDING:** Homelessness and housing instability were observed in higher proportions among chronically sanctioned participants.

ACTIONS

- A. Conduct a housing survey during the Home-Interview Program (HIP) home visit to provide aggregate data to assist in advocacy efforts.**

Collecting relevant information such as amount of rent and household size can assist in addressing the gap between rents and cash grants.

Survey Completed – Report Short-Term

- B. Collect housing data from Housing Locator Services agencies under contract on the number of housing units, as well as on actual cost of housing.**

This will provide reliable data on low-cost housing in LA County.

Completed

**Sanctioned Participants and the Challenge of Meeting Welfare-to-Work
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Action Plan

- V. RESEARCH FINDING:** Chronically sanctioned participants are 61 percent more likely than never sanctioned participants to have unmet child care needs.

ACTIONS

- A. Reduce delays in providing child care, addressing the duplicate/complex paperwork.**

This will alleviate unmet child care needs.

Mid-Term Goal

- B. Identify CalWORKs participants who are unable to participate or fully participate in Welfare-to-Work requirements because they lack access to child care, and target these participants to ensure that they have the necessary information to access these services. In addition, outreach to existing participants without child care.**

This will promote higher levels of active engagement and result in the achievement of more positive outcomes. Identifying participants without child care and addressing their needs will increase child care utilization and reduce sanctions.

Short-Term Goal

- C. Provide child care information during the CalWORKs eligibility process.**

Providing referrals to child care providers prior to Orientation will facilitate participants connecting with child care providers earlier.

Completed

- D. Refer participants to child care coordinators to facilitate requests for child care providers prior to GAIN orientation.**

This will expedite participants finding child care.

Completed

- E. GSW to provide information on child care prior to the Orientation & Appraisal appointment.**

This will ensure participants have child care for Orientation.

Completed

- F. Pilot a system with the Resource and Referral agencies to provide enhanced referrals to licensed child care providers who provide short-term child care and expedite processing of short-term child care requests.**

Providing enhanced referrals will help meet the needs of participants who need short-term child care to participate in GAIN.

Completed

**Sanctioned Participants and the Challenge of Meeting Welfare-to-Work
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Action Plan

VI. RESEARCH FINDING: Focus group interviews pointed to a number of problems participants have in accessing transportation services. Also, transportation problems prevented a significantly higher proportion of chronically sanctioned participants from working when compared to never sanctioned participants.

ACTIONS

A. Pursue adding transportation on the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) System.

Providing money for transportation through EBT will expedite the process.

Mid-Term Goal

B. Align transportation issuances with the length of the component.

This will eliminate breaks in payments when a participant is in a long-term component, enabling a participant to be fully engaged in welfare-to-work activities.

Mid-Term Goal

C. Outreach to participants in components without transportation.

Identifying participant without transportation and addressing this need will increase transportation utilization and reduce sanctions.

Mid-Term Goal

D. Provide a weekly bus pass when requested and if eligible.

Providing immediate transportation will help participants quickly engage in WtW activities.

Completed

**Sanctioned Participants and the Challenge of Meeting Welfare-to-Work
Requirements in the Era of TANF Reauthorization**

Action Plan

VII. RESEARCH FINDING: Participants coming from larger households are more likely to become chronically sanctioned.

ACTIONS

- A. Contact all participants at least monthly to ensure all eligible services are offered and provide assistance to resolve barriers.**

The monthly contacts will allow for identifying needs and barriers encountered by participants and resolving them.

Completed

VIII. RESEARCH FINDING: 40% of the chronically-sanctioned respondents either did not know that they were sanctioned or why they were sanctioned. Also, chronically-sanctioned participants tend to have more educational deficits than never-sanctioned and short-term sanctioned participants.

ACTIONS

- A. Expand role of GSHVO staff and extend 15-day follow-up period for formerly sanctioned participants.**

Focusing on formerly sanctioned participants and ensuring successful participation will reduce repeat sanctions.

Mid-Term Goal

- B. Contract with a readability expert to review current and future forms for appropriate grade level to ensure participants understand the forms. Involve stakeholders in readability prioritizing process, explore how to ensure translations are done at the same grade level as the English forms, and include testing for readability by participants.**

Modifying applicable forms to an appropriate grade level will assist participants better understand the information on the forms.

Mid-Term Goal

- C. Outreach to cases with history of multiple (more than one) sanctions.**

Creating diverse strategies for families with barriers will reliably lead to desired outcomes.

Short-Term Goal

- D. Ensure that noncompliant participants receive a timely Notice of Action, and ensure that they are made aware of their sanction and the specific reason for the imposition of the financial penalty by an advance phone call.**

To ensure creation of diverse strategies that will be sustainable over an extended period of time and which will reliably lead to desired outcomes.

Short-Term Goal

- E. Consider the use of performance incentives to reward GSWs who are able to engage noncompliant and sanctioned cases. Explore funding for regions for reward programs (e.g., gift certificates).**

Incentives will motivate staff to re-engage participants.

Long-Term Goal

**Sanctioned Participants and the Challenge of Meeting Welfare-to-Work
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Action Plan

VIII. RESEARCH FINDING: 40% of the chronically-sanctioned respondents either did not know that they were sanctioned or why they were sanctioned. Also, chronically-sanctioned participants tend to have more educational deficits than never-sanctioned and short-term sanctioned participants.

ACTIONS

- F. Implement an outreach program to re-engage participants who entered CalWORKs before 1998 and who are in a penalty period due to multiple or long-term sanctions.**

A targeted outreach will assist long-term sanctioned participants with services to expedite their transition from the welfare system.

Mid-term Goal

- G. Pilot a program involving non-traditional education techniques for learning disabled participants.**

To ensure creation of diverse strategies that will be sustainable over an extended period of time and which will reliably lead to desired outcomes.

Long-Term Goal

- H. Enhance learning disabled screening, upgrade screening process and serve non-English/non-Spanish participants.**

To ensure creation of diverse strategies that will be sustainable over an extended period of time and which will reliably lead to desired outcomes.

Long-Term Goal

- I. Implement a program for the CalWORKs case manager to review the details of the sanction with each sanctioned participant at the annual CalWORKs redetermination interview.**

An explanation of sanction process, the reason for the action, and applicable forms will enable the participant to understand and resolve the sanction.

Completed

- J. Expand the GAIN Sanction Home Visit Outreach project, giving priority to long-term sanctions.**

Outreach to long-term participants will focus resources on most adversely impacted participants.

Completed

- K. Assign a dedicated GSW to be the point of contact with sanctioned participants.**

This provides a point of contact and ends confusion on who to contact to cure a sanction.

Completed

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Action Plan

VIII. RESEARCH FINDING: 40% of the chronically-sanctioned respondents either did not know that they were sanctioned or why they were sanctioned. Also, chronically-sanctioned participants tend to have more educational deficits than never-sanctioned and short-term sanctioned participants.

ACTIONS

- L. Rewrite the PA 125, Monthly Notice to All Participants Currently in Sanction Status, which allows participants to end their sanction.**

This revision simplifies how to cure sanctions.

Completed

- M. Continue to measure outreach efforts to ensure new policies and procedures are producing positive results.**

Tracking performance leads to better service outcomes

Completed

- N. Take measures to ensure participants understand Welfare-to-Work requirements from the beginning of their involvement in GAIN by expanding the Home Interview Program (HIP) to share information on WtW process, GAIN Orientation, Child Care, Transportation, Good Cause, Exemptions, Education/Training, Self-Initiated Programs (SIP), and Non-Compliance and Sanctions.**

Improved communication will increase a participant's likelihood of successful participation.

Completed

**Sanctioned Participants and the Challenge of Meeting Welfare-to-Work
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Action Plan

IX. RESEARCH FINDING: Findings suggest that many sanctions may be related to communication problems.

ACTIONS

- A. Establish appropriate measures to ensure that the communication between CalWORKs participants and GSWs is improved by addressing enhanced access to GSWs by phone, reducing staff re-assignments (e.g., reducing specialized files, exploring extra step increase for GSWs to reduce staff turnover) and to the extent possible, sitting with participants to explain forms (such as QR 7) to promote better understanding.**

To improve communication between staff and participants to: (1) Promote accurate and reliable exchange of information, (2) Facilitate more accurate identification of needs that participants may be reluctant to disclose, (3) Achieve consistency in both methods of communication and contents of communication – all of which will contribute towards decreasing compliance episodes, reducing sanctions and achieving more positive outcomes.

Long-Term Goal

- B. Provide participants ongoing support and communication about Welfare-to-Work requirements by providing a DVD at HIP visit to participants about the GAIN Program, covering overview material shared in Appraisal and Orientation during the HIP home visit.**

To improve communication between staff and participants to: (1) Promote accurate and reliable exchange of information, (2) Facilitate more accurate identification of needs that participants may be reluctant to disclose, (3) Achieve consistency in both methods of communication and contents of communication – all of which will contribute towards decreasing compliance episodes, reducing sanctions and achieving more positive outcomes.

Long-Term Goal

- C. Provide more flexibility in meeting requirements by utilizing alternate work hours, 1-800 #'s, DV waivers, and e-mail for participant documents.**

To improve communication between staff and participants to: (1) Promote accurate and reliable exchange of information, (2) Facilitate more accurate identification of needs that participants may be reluctant to disclose, (3) Achieve consistency in both methods of communication and contents of communication – all of which will contribute towards decreasing compliance episodes, reducing sanctions and achieving more positive outcomes.

Long-Term Goal

**Sanctioned Participants and the Challenge of Meeting Welfare-to-Work
Requirements in the Era of TANF Reauthorization**

Action Plan

IX. RESEARCH FINDING: Findings suggest that many sanctions may be related to communication problems.

ACTIONS

D.1. Conduct training to provide case management staff with needed skills to:

- Identify deeper issues that may not be initially disclosed (this includes identifying a need for an exemption and assisting participants in obtaining documentation).
- Further strengthen knowledge and practices relating to sensitivity, dignity and respect.
- Build trusting, less bureaucratic relationships with participants, listen and understand participants' situations, and facilitate supportive relationships.
- Identify participants with Specialized Supportive Services needs (disclosed or undisclosed), providing them information about/referrals to available services in a positive, supportive manner.
- Make the program more attractive by reviewing the full range of options and services with participants (include job developers and assessors as trainers during this segment).

Providing case managers with training on interviewing skills and overall program activities will put them in a better position to assist with hidden barriers. Once the "why" is uncovered, staff can assist participants in eliminating barriers.

Broadening employment preparation strategies will assist in reducing levels of unemployment among the chronically sanctioned.

Mid-Term Goal

D.2. Academy training/material should:

- Use focus group material from study/real case scenarios.
- Be put on CDs/Intranet, including trainer's notes and handouts.
- Be enhanced with additional training/participation from GAIN line, program and consultant staff.

Mixing up curriculum with real cases, as well as input from a broad range of individuals engaged in employment services will make the training more meaningful and more likely for GSWs to remember/apply on a day-to-day basis. Having CDs/material to take with them will provide reinforcement on the job following formal training.

Long-Term Goal

D.3. Explore expanding Academy resources to provide small-group, adult-oriented case management training.

Small-group settings will invite more discussion/more learning.

Mid-Term Goal

Sanctioned Participants and the Challenge of Meeting Welfare-to-Work Requirements in the Era of TANF Reauthorization

Action Plan

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| IX. <u>RESEARCH FINDING:</u> Findings suggest that many sanctions may be related to communication problems. |
| ACTIONS |
| <p>D.4. Conduct periodic reinforcement training on program rules to ensure consistently accurate information is being disseminated uniformly to all participants.</p> <p><i>This will promote better communication between staff and participants regarding program services/expectations, resulting in reduced noncompliance/sanctions.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Short-Term Goal</i></p> |
| <p>E. Institute better communication between EWs and GSWs. Streamline the communication process between CalWORKs and GAIN for participants, e.g., explore reducing the number of EWs handling WtW cases and assigning specialized EWs for SB 1569 (trafficking victims' cases).</p> <p><i>To improve communication between staff and participants to: (1) Promote accurate and reliable exchange of information, (2) Facilitate more accurate identification of needs that participants may be reluctant to disclose, (3) Achieve consistency in both methods of communication and contents of communication – all of which will contribute towards decreasing compliance episodes, reducing sanctions, and achieving more positive outcomes.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Mid-Term Goal</i></p> |
| <p>F. Provide warnings prior to Notices of Action that allow participants the opportunity to remedy problems before threatening them with sanctions. Provide more time and chances to comply. This can be achieved by outreaching to individuals who fail to comply before noncompliance is initiated.</p> <p><i>To improve communication between staff and participants to: (1) Promote accurate and reliable exchange of information, (2) Facilitate more accurate identification of needs that participants may be reluctant to disclose, (3) Achieve consistency in both methods of communication and contents of communication – all of which will contribute towards decreasing compliance episodes, reducing sanctions, and achieving more positive outcomes.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Mid-Term Goal</i></p> |
| <p>G. Increase communication between GSWs and R&R agencies by having the Child Care Coordinator as a liaison between GSWs and Alternative Payment Programs.</p> <p><i>To improve communication between staff and participants to: (1) Promote accurate and reliable exchange of information, (2) Facilitate more accurate identification of needs that participants may be reluctant to disclose, (3) Achieve consistency in both methods of communication and contents of communication – all of which will contribute towards decreasing compliance episodes, reducing sanctions, and achieving more positive outcomes.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Short-Term Goal</i></p> |
| <p>H. Contact all participants, except those receiving Specialized Supportive Services (SSS), at least monthly to ensure all eligible services are offered and provide assistance to resolve barriers. Provide follow-up phone contact during non-traditional hours; written contacts should be with unique letterhead/envelope to increase likelihood of participant opening/reading it. SSS participants are to be contacted quarterly</p> <p><i>Monthly contacts will allow for identifying needs and barriers encountered by participants and resolving them.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Completed</i></p> |

**Sanctioned Participants and the Challenge of Meeting Welfare-to-Work
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Action Plan

IX. RESEARCH FINDING: Findings suggest that many sanctions may be related to communication problems.

ACTIONS

I. Implement automation changes to enhance communication with participants by:

- Facilitating changes to telephone and address records,
- Improving the OAP appointment letter process to ensure participants receive the notice on time.

Improved communication will increase a participant's likelihood of successful participation.

Completed

J. Enhance services to participants by:

- Rewriting the OAP appointment letters.
- Calling participants to remind them of his/her OAP appointment.
- Providing training to staff on customer service.
- Providing GSWs improved access to Eligibility staff.

Improved communication will increase a participant's likelihood of successful participation.

Completed

K. Translate all GAIN forms sent to GAIN participants into the threshold languages.

Improved communication will increase a participant's likelihood of successful participation.

Completed

L. Review NOA process to ID/correct problems that cause delay in delivery of Notices of Action.

To improve communication between staff and participants to: (1) Promote accurate and reliable exchange of information, (2) Facilitate more accurate identification of needs that participants may be reluctant to disclose, (3) Achieve consistency in both methods of communication and contents of communication – all of which will contribute towards decreasing compliance episodes, reducing sanctions, and achieving more positive outcomes.

Completed